

## **CANADIAN ANGLICAN BISHOP DENIES HELL**

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The following is from the Ottawa Citizen, September 26, 1997 --

It's time for Christians to drop the idea that Christ is the one sure way to salvation, says Vancouver's Anglican bishop, Michael Ingham.

In a controversial new book, *Mansions of the Spirit*, Bishop Ingham says he doubts what has been a central tenet of the Christian faith for most of the last 2,000 years: that God can be known only through Christ.

That conviction is increasingly untenable in a world where we now regularly encounter members of other faiths "whose depth of intimacy with God is evident and radiant," he says.

The fundamentalist belief that billions of non-Christians will be consigned to an "eternity of everlasting fire defies all moral sense and contradicts everything we know about God," he writes.

Bishop Ingham said in an interview that his book will displease many Anglicans in his own diocese, and anger Christian fundamentalists, but he says most Christians who have heard him speak on the topic feel only a sense of relief that a church leader is finally saying what most people seem to believe.

He said fundamentalism is on the rise around the world, not only among Christians, but also among other faiths.

"It's a great threat to peace and security, and is based on a mis-reading of Scripture."

He said this Christian exclusivism has also turned many people off religion, because they see religion as creating violence instead of peace.

"What I'm advocating is a pluralist theology that accepts God's grace in the great religions of the world, and calls us to see people of other faiths and traditions as brothers and sisters."

Bishop Ingham said there is little in his book that is new to Christian scholars, but it will undoubtedly surprise many of the people in the pews.

He said the attitudes of most of the Christian churches have also changed over the years. In 1438, the Council of Florence, for example, agreed that all outside the Roman Catholic Church,

whether Jews, or heretics "will go to the everlasting fire which was prepared for the devil and his angels."

That idea simply legitimized discrimination and barbarism toward non-Christians, Bishop Ingham said.

Today, however, the Catechism of the Catholic Church says that God himself can lead non-Christians to salvation in ways we do not understand. Those who do not know Christ or his church may still achieve salvation if they seek God with a sincere heart, and try to do his will as they know it.

Bishop Ingham says some have called him the "Bishop John Spong of Canada", after the Episcopalian bishop in the U.S. who has denied the virgin birth and defied church authorities by ordaining gay priests. Bishop Ingham advocates ordaining gays and lesbians but says he's no John Spong.

"I'm not questioning the virgin birth or the central doctrines of the faith. What I am challenging is more the way they have been applied. I don't see this as being doctrinally radical, but as being pastorally sensitive to the changing situation the church finds itself in."

He said he sees Canada "as one of God's great experiments. It's as if God is seeing if the nations of the world can live together in a highly multi-ethnic, multi-religious country.

"We've seen what religious hostility can do to people. We have an opportunity to establish another way of doing things in Canada."

Bishop Ingham says Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam, Christianity or Judaism are paths to God that have withstood the test of centuries, and he would neither write off New Age beliefs nor universally accept them (Bob Harvey, "Jesus is not the only way, Anglican bishop says," The Ottawa Citizen, September 26, 1997).